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Biden leaves door open for Senate changes to advance agenda

By JONATHAN LEMIRE and ZEKE MILLER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden at his first news conference Thursday left the door open to backing fundamental changes in Senate procedure to muscle key parts of his agenda like immigration and voting rights past Republican opposition "if there's complete lockdown and chaos." The 78-year-old president also for the first time said his "plan is to run for reelection, that is my expectation." Even as his administration navigates the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic damage, Biden is grappling with a host of pressing issues, including a pair of mass shootings, rising international tensions, early signs of divisions within his party and increasing numbers of migrants crossing the southern border. The president preached the political expedience of caution in the face of mounting impatience among progressive voters eager for action on his ambitious legislative agenda. He teased changes to the congressional filibuster if necessary to achieve some of those goals. Biden at first backed a modification — but not elimination — of the arcane procedural tactic, which stands in the way of getting the president's agenda through the deadlocked Senate.

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President Joe Biden speaks during a news conference in the East Room of the White House, Thursday, March 25, 2021, in Washington.

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Biden leaves door open for Senate changes to advance agenda

Continued from Front

But he then suggested, at least on certain issues, he would go further, saying the filibuster — which requires 60 votes to pass legislation in the Senate — was being “abused in a gigantic way” by Republicans.

“If there’s complete lockdown and chaos, as a consequence of the filibuster, then we’re going to have to go beyond what I’m talking about,” he said.

“I want to get things done. I want to get them done consistent with what we promised the American people,” said Biden, who spent decades in the Senate. “I am going to say something outrageous: I have never been particularly poor at calculating how to get things done in the United States Senate.” “I am going to deal with all of those problems,” he pledged.

One key item on the list: Republican efforts to limit voting rights, an effort the president deemed “sick” and “un-American.” He argued that even GOP voters believe actions that make it harder for people to cast ballots are “despicable” attempts to undermine democracy.

The president was repeatedly pressed about the



Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., speaks to Special Operations Command Gen. Richard Clarke after a hearing to examine United States Special Operations Command and United States Cyber Command in review of the Defense Authorization Request for fiscal year 2022 and the Future Years Defense Program, on Capitol Hill, Thursday, March 25, 2021, in Washington.

Associated Press

situation at the U.S.-Mexico border, where increasing numbers of young migrants have overwhelmed the government’s holding facilities. Biden promised better media access to the camps — once his administration has a better handle on things — as well as improvements to the nation’s immigration system and U.S. help to improve conditions in the migrants’ home countries.

“I can’t guarantee that we’re going to solve everything, but I can guarantee that we’re going to make it better,” he said.

And in the aftermath of two mass shootings in a

week, Biden was pressed on his plans for new gun violence laws. He responded that legislating is “a matter of timing” and then gave a long-winded answer about his infrastructure plan, which he said will be his administration’s next legislative priority.

Biden had held off on holding his first news conference until he could use it to celebrate progress against the pandemic and passage of a giant COVID-19 relief package.

In his opening remarks, he declared that “hope is on the way,” and he doubled his original goal on COVID-19 vaccines by pledging

that the nation will administer 200 million doses by the end of his first 100 days in office. The administration had met Biden’s initial goal of 100 million doses earlier this month — before even his 60th day in office — as the president pushes to defeat a pandemic that has killed more than 545,000 Americans.

While seemingly ambitious, Biden’s vaccine goal amounts to a continuation of the existing pace of vaccinations through the end of next month.

When Biden moved on to fielding questions, the president didn’t get a single query about the virus that has rewritten the rules of society for more than a year. Biden was the first chief executive in four decades to reach this point in his term without holding a formal news conference, where reporters have the opportunity for extended back-and-forth with the president on the issues of the day. That delay produced a surprising level of anticipation for a chief executive who has deliberately tried to turn down the temperature in a city overheated by his predecessor Donald Trump.

He acknowledged several vexing foreign policy problems that he faces immediately, including growing concerns about North Korea’s nuclear program, a looming May 1 deadline to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan, and China’s rising stature as an economic competitor to the United States.

Early Thursday, North Korea launched the first ballistic missile tests of the Biden administration, what some analysts say was a measured provocation to catch the new president’s attention. The Biden administration has sought to restart talks with Kim Jong Un’s regime in hopes of convincing the North to give up its nuclear program, but thus far has faced radio silence from the North. Biden was restrained as he admonished the North for the latest tests.

“There will be responses if

they choose to escalate,” he said. “We will respond accordingly. But I’m also prepared for some form of diplomacy, but it has to be conditioned upon the end result of denuclearization.”

On Afghanistan, Biden committed to pulling U.S. troops out of Afghanistan, but expressed doubts about meeting the May 1 deadline that was set by an agreement signed under Trump.

“We will leave,” he said. “The question is when we will leave.”

He added that he did not believe troops would still be there in 2022. Biden also vowed that China’s ambition of becoming the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world is “not going to happen under my watch.”

The scene for Biden’s press conference was very different from what Americans are used to seeing at such events. The president still stood behind a podium in the East Room against a backdrop of flags. But due to the pandemic, the White House limited attendance and only 30 socially distanced chairs for journalists were spread out in the expansive room.

West Wing aides had dismissed the high interest in the news conference as a Washington obsession, pointing to Biden’s high approval ratings while suggesting that the general public was not concerned about the event. The president himself, when asked Wednesday if he were ready for the press conference, joked, “What press conference?”

The nationally televised event was a chance for reporters to press Biden and move him away from the carefully curated talking points produced by his extremely disciplined White House. There were none of the personal attacks on members of the press like those made by his predecessor, yet at one point he noted that the session had run more than an hour and it was time to wrap up.

“Folks, I’m going,” Biden said as he walked away. □

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Georgia House passes GOP election bill despite criticism

By BEN NADLER
Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The Georgia state House on Thursday passed legislation brought by Republicans that could lead to a sweeping overhaul of state election law, including provisions adding new requirements and restrictions on absentee voting and giving the GOP-led legislature greater control over the administration of elections.

The bill, which Democrats and voting rights groups say would disproportionately disenfranchise voters of color, is part of a wave of GOP-backed election bills introduced in states across the country after former President Donald Trump stoked false claims that fraud led to his election loss in November.

The GOP efforts to change voting laws in Georgia come after record-breaking turnout led to Democratic victories in the presidential election and two U.S. Senate runoffs in the once reliably red state. The measure will now head to the state Senate for more debate. It could result in a House-Senate conference committee where the two chambers hash out their differences before voting again on a compromise bill.

Republican Gov. Brian Kemp has endorsed one prominent piece of the bill requiring a photo ID for ab-



Rep. Barry Fleming receives a hug from Rep. Lynn Smith, R-Newnan, after a bill he sponsored, SB 202, passed in the House Chambers in a legislative session at the Georgia State Capitol Building in Atlanta, Thursday, March 25, 2021.

Associated Press

sentee voting but has otherwise refrained from publicly weighing in.

The bill passed the House 100-75, with Republicans in support and Democrats opposed.

Democratic Rep. Rhonda Burnough said the bill was based on lies told by Republicans after last year's election.

"Georgians turned out in record-breaking numbers because they could access the ballot," Burnough said. "Lies upon lies were told about our elections in response, and now this bill is before us built on those same lies."

The bill would require a photo ID in order to vote absentee by mail, after more than 1.3 million Georgia voters used that option during the COVID-19 pandemic. It would also cut the time period people have to request an absentee ballot and limit where ballot drop boxes can be placed and when they can be accessed.

Republican Rep. Jan Jones said the provisions cutting the time people have to request an absentee ballot are meant to "increase the likelihood of a voter's vote being cast successfully," after concerns were raised in

2020 about mail ballots not being received by counties in time to be counted.

The bill would also bar outside groups from handing out food or water to people standing in line to vote. One of the biggest changes in the bill would give the GOP-controlled legislature more control over election administration, a change that has caused concern among voting rights groups who say it could lead to greater partisan influence. The bill would replace the elected secretary of state as the chair of the state election board with a new appointee of the legislature

after Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger rebuffed Trump's attempts to overturn Georgia's election results. It would also allow the board to remove and replace county election officials deemed to be underperforming.

That provision is widely seen as something that could be used to target Fulton County, a Democratic stronghold that includes most of Atlanta, which came under fire after long lines plagued primary elections over the summer. Republican Rep. Barry Fleming, who has been a driving force in crafting the bill, said that provision would only be a "temporary fix, so to speak, that ends and the control is turned back over to the locals after the problems are resolved."

The bill also reduces the timeframe in which runoff elections are held, including the amount of early voting for runoffs.

The bill does not contain some of the more contentious proposals that were floated by Republicans earlier in the session, including limits on early voting on Sundays, a popular day for Black churchgoers to vote in "souls to the polls" events. It would instead mandate two Saturdays of early voting ahead of general elections, when only one is currently mandatory, and leave two Sundays as optional. □

Senate votes to extend small biz loan program for 2 months

By KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate passed a bill 92-7 on Thursday to extend the deadline for business owners to apply for forgivable loans through the Paycheck Protection Program, giving applicants two more months to apply for federal aid. The bill had already passed the House, so it now goes to President Joe Biden's desk to be signed into law. Congress started the loan program last year to help businesses survive

the COVID-19 pandemic. The deadline for applications would be extended to May 31 under the bill, and the federal government would have until June 30 to process the applications. The COVID-19 relief bill that Biden signed into law this month included another \$7.25 billion for the program, but it did not extend the timeline for getting the loans. Business groups lobbied lawmakers to keep the program going to help ensure businesses that still need help can get it.

The Small Business Administration reports that it has approved nearly 7.9 million loans totaling about \$704 billion. The loans are structured so that they can be fully forgiven if the recipient attempts to maintain similar levels of employment and uses at least 60% of the loan to cover payroll costs. The remaining 40% can be spent on rent, utility costs and other operational expenses. "This bipartisan legislation comes at a time when small business owners are still grappling with the



Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York, holds a news conference, Thursday, March 25, 2021 on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Associated Press

economic effects of the pandemic and extending the Paycheck Protection Program, even for just a short time to exhaust existing funding, will help some

of the small businesses that need it most," said Neil Bradley, executive vice president and chief policy officer, U.S. Chamber of Commerce. □

Border crossings strain resources in Rio Grande Valley

By **ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON**
and **JOHN MONE**

The Associated Press

HARLINGEN, Texas (AP) —

Elmer Maldonado spent a week in immigration custody with his 1-year-old son after crossing the Rio Grande through Texas to request asylum. One night, the Honduran father and son slept on the dirt under a bridge shivering from the cold temperatures at an intake site where large groups of migrants turn themselves in to Border Patrol officers.

His experience illustrates a cycle that is repeating itself thousands of times a week amid a dramatic rise in migrant children and families at the U.S.-Mexico border: They arrive in the middle of the night by the dozens and are kept at outdoor intake sites, then taken to overcrowded detention facilities well past the 72-hour court-imposed limit. From there, the families are either released into the U.S. or expelled to Mexico, the lucky ones dropped off at a COVID-19 testing site with documents. Children traveling without their parents go to federal shelters that are also quickly filling up. The process is largely out of the public eye. The Associated Press has not been allowed in any of the Border Patrol facilities. Journalists are often limited by authorities even when going the banks of the Rio Grande to witness the process and talk to immigrants. Immigration agencies re-



A migrant man, center, holds a child as he looks at a U.S. Customs and Border Protection agent at an intake area after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, early Wednesday, March 24, 2021, in Roma, Texas.

Associated Press

stricted Associated Press journalists from getting closer to popular crossing areas, an outdoor intake site and interdictions on multiple occasions in recent days.

On a recent afternoon, Maldonado, 40, of Olancho, Honduras, lay on the bottom couch of a bunk bed in a Harlingen, Texas, shelter where migrants stay before they take buses or flights to other U.S. destinations. His son woke up crying and coughing, and he held him against his chest rocking him back to sleep. "He caught a cold since that night we were out," he said. "We were shivering. For a moment I thought my body was not going to

heat up."

Once released, the father-son duo was able to take a shower and change into a new set of clothes. The shelter donated some diapers for his son. Once the boy got up, he grabbed a container with chicken nuggets that he tried and quickly tossed aside, preferring instead a small juice box.

The Biden administration says that it's working to address the increase in migrants coming to the border. On Wednesday, President Joe Biden tapped Vice President Kamala Harris to lead the White House efforts at the U.S. southern border and work with Central American nations to

address root causes of the migration. The government also issued a statement saying it will provide a daily tally of child migrants in custody.

The government said there were nearly 5,000 children in Border Patrol custody as of Tuesday and an additional 11,551 at shelters from the Department of Health and Human Services.

Earlier this week, three groups of migrants with young children could be spotted walking dirt paths in the brush north of the river in a short helicopter ride with Texas state troopers over the Rio Grande Valley. Boys jumped up and down and waved seemingly ex-

cited to see the helicopters hovering.

"When he saw the helicopter he said 'papa, papa, papa,'" Maldonado recalled his boy saying. "He gets happy when he sees exciting new things. Sometimes he hears loud noises and it scares him, he's still little and doesn't understand much."

Victor Escalon, regional director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, says he worried the more people are smuggled across the Rio Grande, the more opportunities for criminal organizations to flourish in the area.

"As a parent, as a human being, you want to make sure (migrant children) are cared for. They are kids. They don't know any different," he said. "But the more people you bring across, the individuals who are in charge of coordinating the criminal element, the smuggling of narcotics they are going to look for opportunities."

Escalon says the busiest Texas corridor for migrants right now goes from La Joya on the east to Roma on the west, where Associated Press journalists observed apparent smugglers taking people across the river in inflatable rafts early Wednesday. Most of the migrants were women carrying babies and toddlers asleep in their arms or on their backs. Officials in other sectors are seeing increasing numbers stretching their capacity as well. □



Law enforcement members respond to the University of Kentucky Chandler Hospital in Lexington, Ky., Thursday, March 25, 2021.

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. (AP) —

Kentucky man as he left a hospital after receiving a

Armed man arrested at University of Kentucky hospital

tip from another police department that he was in the area. A large police presence was at the University of Kentucky's Chandler Hospital emergency room Thursday and university officials asked students and visitors to stay away from the area.

University of Kentucky Police Chief Joe Monroe said the man, Bryan Carroll of Versailles, was arrested

without incident as soon as he exited the hospital. He was at the hospital to visit a family member, Monroe said. He was carrying firearms. The chief said officers also found body armor and possible explosive devices in his car.

Monroe said Carroll will face state and federal charges. The campus police were tipped by police in Versailles, Monroe said.

The university sent out a campus alert around 11 a.m. asking people to avoid the area. University officials said other parts of the campus were safe and operating normally. Officials gave the all-clear about four hours later.

The FBI, campus police and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were also on the scene. □

North Korea test-fires ballistic missiles in message to U.S.

By KIM TONG-HYUNG

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)

— North Korea on Thursday test-fired its first ballistic missiles since President Joe Biden took office as it expands its military capabilities and increases pressure on Washington while nuclear negotiations remain stalled. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said North Korea's resumption of ballistic testing threatens "peace and safety in Japan and the region," and that Tokyo will closely coordinate with Washington and Seoul on the North's military activities.

South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong, after meeting his Russian counterpart in Seoul, expressed "deep concern" and urged the North to uphold its commitments for peace. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called for a swift resumption of dialogue to resolve the standoff with North Korea.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the two short-range missiles were fired at 7:06 a.m. and 7:25 a.m. on the North's eastern coast and flew 450 kilometers (279 miles) on an apogee



This Aug. 29, 2017, file photo provided by the North Korean government shows what was said to be the test launch of a Hwasong-12 intermediate range missile in Pyongyang, North Korea.

Associated Press

of 60 kilometers (37 miles) before landing in the sea.

A senior U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military observations, matched the information from Tokyo and Seoul, saying that initial assessments suggest the North fired two short-range ballistic missiles.

"This activity highlights the threat that North Korea's illicit weapons program poses to its neighbors and the international community," said U.S. Indo-Pacific Com-

mand spokesperson Capt. Mike Kafka. The launches came a day after U.S. and South Korean officials said the North fired short-range weapons presumed to be cruise missiles into its western sea over the weekend. North Korea has a history of testing new U.S. administrations with missile launches and other provocations aimed at forcing the Americans back to the negotiating table.

Still, Thursday's launches were a measured provo-

cation compared to the nuclear and intercontinental missile tests in 2017 that inspired war fears before the North shifted toward diplomacy with the Trump administration in 2018.

It's unclear how the Biden administration will respond before it completes its policy review on North Korea in coming weeks.

The missile launches followed a trip by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to Japan and South

Korea last week as Washington pushes to restore its alliances in Asia.

During the trip, Blinken sternly criticized North Korea's nuclear program and human rights record and pressed China to use its "tremendous influence" to convince the North to de-nuclearize.

North Korean state media had said Tuesday that leader Kim Jong Un reaffirmed his country's traditional alliance with China while exchanging messages with Chinese President Xi Jinping in an apparent response to Biden's efforts to coordinate action on North Korea with his allies.

The negotiations over the North's nuclear program faltered after the collapse of Kim's second summit with President Donald Trump in February 2019, when the Americans rejected North Korean demands for major sanctions relief in exchange for a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

Since Trump's first meeting with Kim in 2018, the North has not conducted nuclear or long-range missile tests, although analysts believe it has pressed ahead with both programs. □

EU's top court rejects effort to force tougher climate rules

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union's top court on Thursday rejected an effort by a Scandinavian youth group and families around the world to force the EU to set more ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, arguing that they were not "individually" affected by Europe's climate policy. Those behind the initiative — including a Portuguese farmer, an Arctic indigenous activist and German islanders — expressed disappointment at the ruling, but also were determined to keep fighting for faster action against climate change.

Families from Kenya, Fiji, Germany, France, Italy, Portugal and Romania, along with the Swedish Sami Youth organization, launched the legal ac-

tion in 2018. They hoped to draw attention to the impact that climate policy had on individuals and those fighting for starving Arctic reindeer and other environmental issues.

The European General Court acknowledged that the plaintiffs are generally affected by climate change but rejected the case in 2019 on procedural grounds. The families and youth group appealed to the European Court of Justice, or ECJ, the bloc's top court.

The ECJ upheld the lower court's decision Thursday, saying the plaintiffs "are not individually concerned" by the EU's climate legislation so the case won't be heard.

"The Sami people live in the middle of the climate crisis every day. We see

how the climate crisis affects the reindeer, nature and our culture," Sanna Vannar of the Sami youth organization told reporters. "It makes me so angry and frustrated that the EU does not take this problem seriously and address it like an emergency."

Plaintiff Alfredo Sendim, a Portuguese farmer who has struggled with season after season of drought, said:

"The court's decision is disappointing, but we will not give up. We will continue seeking protection of our rights and demand climate protection."

After the legal effort was launched, the European Commission proposed a "European Green Deal" with more ambitious goals toward fighting climate change. European Union

leaders reached a deal last year to cut the bloc's net greenhouse gas emissions at least 55% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels, more than the previous goal of 40%.

Experts say ending the use of fossil fuels is one of the

most important measures needed to limit global warming, which is believed to be causing stronger storms, fiercer droughts and other weather problems that are damaging lives and livelihoods around the world. □



In this Nov. 29, 2019, file photo, a demonstrator holds a terrestrial globe in Lisbon during a worldwide protest demanding action on climate change.

Associated Press

Final results confirm political deadlock after Israeli vote

By ILAN BEN ZION

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Final election results show Israel in political deadlock once again, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his opponents falling short of a governing majority. Israel's election commission says that with 100% of votes counted, Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party and his natural allies have won 52 seats in the 120-seat Knesset, Israel's parliament. An ideologically diverse array of parties committed to ousting him won 57 seats. A right-wing party won seven seats and an Arab Islamist party won four. Both are uncommitted, but given the many rivalries in parliament, it is not clear whether either one of them could deliver a required majority.

Party leaders have already begun negotiations that are expected to drag on for weeks. If no one is able to assemble a majority of at least 61 seats, then Israel will go to elections for an unprecedented fifth time in a little over two years.

Tuesday's vote, Israel's fourth parliamentary elections in two years, was widely seen as a referendum on



Workers count votes in Israel's national elections wearing and divided in groups by sheets of plastic masks to help curb the spread of the coronavirus, at the Knesset in Jerusalem, Thursday, March 25, 2021.

Netanyahu's fitness to rule while under indictment. Deep divisions between the various parties will make it difficult for either side to gain a majority.

Arab parties have never joined a governing coalition, and for nationalist parties, such an alliance is anathema. Bezalel Smotrich, a Netanyahu ally and head of the far-right Religious Zionist party, said

Thursday that "a right-wing government will not be established with support from Abbas. Period. Not on my watch." He was referring to Mansour Abbas, the head of the United Arab List, which won four seats. Gideon Saar, a defector from Netanyahu's Likud who now heads a six-seat party committed to ousting him, said "it is clear that Netanyahu does not have a

majority to form a government under his leadership. Action must now be taken to realize the possibility of forming a government for change."

The Likud, which won the most seats of any party, fired back, saying such a bloc would be "anti-democratic." It compared Netanyahu's opponents to the clerical leadership in Israel's arch-enemy Iran,

which vets candidates for high office. Yohanan Plesner, president of the Israel Democracy Institute, said that the stalemate is Israel's "worst political crisis in decades." "It's apparent that our political system finds it very difficult to produce a decisive outcome," Plesner said. He added that inherent weaknesses in Israel's electoral system are compounded by "the Netanyahu factor": a popular prime minister struggling to stay in power while under indictment. "Israelis are split right down the middle on this question."

Several of Netanyahu's opponents have started discussing advancement of a bill to disqualify a politician under indictment from being tasked with forming a government, a measure aimed at barring the long-serving prime minister from office. A similar bill was floated after the March 2020 elections, but was never passed. Netanyahu is on trial for fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three cases. He has denied any wrongdoing and has dismissed the charges as a witch-hunt by a biased law enforcement and media. □

Associated Press

Jihadi rebels hit town in north Mozambique near gas project



In this photo dated Friday Feb. 19, 2021, made available by Medecins Sans Frontieres, showing an MSF (Doctors Without Borders) staff member measuring a child's upper arm circumference to check for malnutrition in Meluco, in the northern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado.

Associated Press

By ANDREW MELDRUM and TOM BOWKER

Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) —

Jihadi rebels are fighting to capture Palma, a strategic town in northern Mozambique where fight-

ing continued Thursday after launching a three-pronged assault on the center a day earlier.

The town in Cabo Delgado province was attacked "in three directions" by "terrorists," according to an official with Mozambique's defense ministry.

The coordinated attacks began just hours after Total, the France-based oil and gas company, announced that it would resume work on its multi-billion-dollar liquefied natural gas project just a few kilometers outside Palma, which is near Mozambique's border with Tanzania.

Mozambique's defense and security forces are "working tirelessly to reestablish security and order as fast as possible" and will

"do everything to guarantee the security" of the local population and of the nearby "economic projects," Ministry of Defense spokesman Col. Omar Saranga said at a news press conference in the capital, Maputo. He said he didn't yet have information on casualties or damage caused by the attack.

Palma had been largely cut off from the rest of Cabo Delgado province for several weeks, as the rebels made road access unsafe, leaving the airport and the seaport as the only routes in and out of the town.

The Islamic extremist rebels already hold the port town of Mocimboa da Praia, which they captured in August. Since then, the insurgents have

seized nearby villages. The jihadis have beheaded scores of people, causing more than 670,000 people to flee their homes, creating a humanitarian crisis in northern Mozambique.

In their assault on Palma, the extremists attacked the airport and two other locations, Saranga said. Residents fled in all directions, but mostly toward Palma's beaches, according to sources who spoke to local news media, including Zitamar News and Pinnacle News.

There were about 100 attackers, reported Pinnacle, citing its network of local sources. Government helicopters flew overhead but didn't open fire because of the difficulty of differentiating attackers from civilians, it reported. □

Clementia Eugene, PhD Candidate & Lecturer: Reflections on Ubuntu and Paga Lomba Social Work Practices in Aruba Social Work Month, 2021

ORANJESTAD —World Social Work day 2021 has chosen 'Ubuntu: Strengthening Social Solidarity and Global Connectedness' as the theme this year, 2021. The word Ubuntu originates from Africa, and it means 'I am because you are. You are because I am. We are nothing without each other'. This theme resonates with me as it reflects my passion for social work that comes from a space of wanting to live in a world of equality, compassion, healing, and happiness. Thus, I have chosen as my life's purpose to empower everyone who crosses my path with any vulnerability to find the strength within themselves to flourish, enjoy a good quality of life and wellbeing.

I am fascinated by the chosen theme because global social work has embraced an African philosophy, Ubuntu. Africa has been engaging in the process of decolonizing social work practice and integrating African concepts and approaches that fill the gaps left behind by western approaches

(Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). Ubuntu is one such concept. It refers to "a collection of values and practices that black people of Africa, or African origin view as making people authentic human beings...It recognizes that an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world" (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020, p. 4).

The virtues that embody the concept Ubuntu also exist in Caribbean cultures. In Aruba for example, the traditional custom of 'Paga Lomba' bears a similar notion of mutual support or reciprocal exchange within the community. In 2001, cultural anthropologist, Dr. Luc Alofs and Leontine Merkies, wrote, "The term 'Paga Lomba' can best be translated as "pay back" and is derived from the Paga Lomba system in agriculture. Relatives and often with outside assistance agree to work on a plot of land, or to reap the harvest based on the reciprocal exchange of labour" (p. 38).

Aruba Doet, which started in 2013



as an initiative of Oranje Fonds and is managed by CEDE Aruba, is an excellent example of Ubuntu and Paga Lomba in action. Aruba Doet encourages everyone to roll up their sleeves to volunteer in a myriad of community projects. In 2020, 170 social organizations completed 191 projects with the support of more than 2000 volunteers. In St. Lucia, my country of origin, there is a similar concept, 'Koudmen,' which is translated to mean 'helping hand' in the French Creole language. It is applied when all members of a community of all ages converge to implement a project, such as the construction or refurbishment of a house, the construction of a footpath, or planting or harvesting agricultural produce. These helping hand activities are done with the commitment of reciprocity, where the favours will be returned for another person or community. They are implemented with the value of social cohesiveness and a recognition of the power of interrelationships, much like the idea of Paga Lomba

is manifested in the case of Aruba Doet.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a vivid illustration of all human beings' interrelatedness and Ubuntu, Koudmen, and Paga Lomba in action across the world. The pandemic radically and overnight changed our lives and livelihood, plunging those already vulnerable into further desperation and poverty. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 34 million jobs were lost by COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean as labor income declined by 19.3%. In Aruba, the situation was similar, where according to the Caribbean COVID-19 Food Security and Livelihoods Impact Survey, 80% of Aruban households experienced job loss or reduced salaries. The individual, local and global responses have been an outpouring of support to provide social protection packages with financial relief to rebuild households' income security and provide for families' wellbeing.

Continued on Page 8

Clementia Eugene, PhD Candidate & Lecturer:

Reflections on Ubuntu and Paga Lomba Social Work Practices in Aruba Social Work Month, 2021

Continued From Page 7

The response to COVID-19 in Aruba was led by many, but the pioneering relief initiative 'Happy to Give Back' of CEDE Aruba, under the leadership of Daniel Tecklenborg, a Social Worker, deserves special mention. This initiative encouraged online donations for immediate support to the local food banks and the most vulnerable in the Aruban community. The implementation of this initiative was made possible by Social Workers, Gabriel Marchena and Lisa Harris from Fundacion pa nos Comunidad. The Aruba Red Cross also expanded its services during COVID-19 under the leadership of Social Worker, Tracey Werleman, an alumna from the University of Aruba who serves as the Social Coordinator for the programs. We salute the following Social Workers who worked collaboratively with Tracey: Mariana da Silva, Maria Jose Catalan, Janesis Cano and Jo

Anne Kock. We are proud of the 13 social work interns from the University of Aruba who collectively volunteered at the Aruba Red Cross and at the Fundacion pa nos Comunidad. These initiatives represent the ethics, values, and principles of Ubuntu: a model of social work practice characterized by inspiring economic progress, social justice, distribution of resources, respect, empowerment, reciprocity and sharing, teamwork, collaboration, and social harmony (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). Additionally, these initiatives demonstrate the vital role of social workers in preventing vulnerability, contributing to national development and building compassionate communities of care in the process.

It is my view that the philosophy of Ubuntu is compatible with developmental thinking. After all, what is the end goal of supporting those in need, if not for human flourishing, and to

promote their health and wellbeing. Ubuntu, Paga Lomba, and Koudmen have one intrinsic value in common; the issue of relationality, i.e., recognizing the power of pursuing communal relationships with others in the quest for human development. Where human development is understood to be the process of enlarging a person's choices by giving them the freedom and opportunities to lead long, healthy, and flourishing lives; to be knowledgeable; to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living; to be able to participate in the life of the community and the upholding of equality amongst all human beings (Human Development Report, 1990; Sen, 1999). Thus, as social workers, we are always called to work in collaboration with others and recognize the central importance of human relationships and, at all times to achieve the goals participants have set for

themselves. Ubuntu, Paga Lomba and Koudmen, all provide the indigenous theoretical grounding of our work, and a new way to appreciate the ethical significance of our social work practice.

Thus, as we celebrate World Social Day, we herald the contributions of all social workers in Aruba, the Caribbean, and worldwide. Let us continue our resolve to promote and work within the philosophy of Ubuntu, Paga Lomba, and Koudmen and aspire to become, "a Social Worker who recognizes and promotes Ubuntu (Paga Lomba, and Koudmen) knows that inherent in each person is dignity and value, and that each person deserves respect and that a person exists

within a cultural setting and a community and that the individual and community shape, influence and benefit from each other" (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020, p. 8).

The clarion call is to integrate the usage of Ubuntu, Paga Lomba, and Koudmen in our social work day-to-day terminologies and practice. Meanwhile, the implication for social work education in Aruba is to take a page from African Social Workers, and conduct additional research to document Paga Lomba experiences towards theorizing this concept as an indigenous social work practice model.

For more information: <http://www.ua.aw/>

Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation. Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.



For today we received an amazing picture from **Michelle Fay** from Pembroke Massachusetts. They wrote:

"Aruba to me is coming back year after year and seeing the friendly faces we've come to know and care about. My parents, Suzanne & Bill Pero, have always stayed at the Divi Divi and couldn't make it this year. I brought them along virtually so they could say hello to David. A Server at the Divi Divi All Inclusive."



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New & unique venue in Oranjestad, a must for visitors! Patio 15 connects Aruba's culture with Caribbean food & cocktails delight

ORANJESTAD — Replica buildings and chain restaurants we can do everywhere and they are all the same, offering the expected. When visiting a place we'd like to see the real thing. Being in Aruba, the pearl of Caribbean, you can feel the energy of a historic house and at the same time indulge in finger-licking food and signature cocktails. There is a new hot spot: **Patio 15**. Make sure to go, it's easily accessible and it has secured private parking.

Step inside the patio

Taste. Sip. Play. It is their slogan. It is a great description of what happens but there is so much more. First of all you get the friendliest welcome in Aruba here by an icon: one of the last real gentlemen, dressed from head to toe in elegance. Listen to his story of how he came to Aruba. This 80-plus sweet doorman who had been working for over 40 years at a department store on the island. Everybody knows him, you should too!

Admire the monument

The yellow color of the sun that is

so typical for authentic Aruban houses catches your attention. You are seated in front of an authentic Aruban home which that was built around 1860 and has been transformed in the year 2020 into a unique outdoor restaurant, bar, dancing, and event space: **Patio 15**. Feel a warm breeze titillating your senses. You are surrounded by night lights and stars and inspired by the hip ambiance while being introduced to Aruba's history at the same time. The patio refers to the outdoor space in front of the house where the family and friends used to gather. Inside antique trinkets take you back to older times against a backdrop of contemporary design. There is a wall that showcases Lps of Aruba's musical heroes.

Mindblowing bites

This casual hipster venue offers you the opportunity to taste all kinds of small bites or tapas with a fuse of international favorites and Aruban local dishes. **Patio 15** serenades Aruba of yesterday while showing you they are the trendsetters du jour.

What to think of a Keeshi Yena



Taco. This is an homage to Aruba's typical cheese/minced meat dish in a taco, Feta Cheese Pizza comes on a watermelon sliced as pizza and with Yerba di Hole on top which is a kind of local basil, the Conch Fritters and the Funchi Fries with delicious Truffle Mayo is a must. Try the scrumptious Escargots & Musrooms or the Vegan Ceviche, yummy! The Best one: Mini Saco, you got to love this creativity because a 'saco' is a typical local snack where chicken, beef, or ribs and potatoes are fried and served in a bag which is the 'saco'. **Patio 15** is still throwing in new offerings

to its 37-piece menu so you can try another selection daily. The traditional Spanish tapas will also be there simply because they are to die for. We would say: go ahead, it is a winning game here. And do not forget to take a Key Lime Pie for dessert, it's an everlasting memory. **Patio 15** Aruba is open Tuesday to Sunday from 5 pm – 11 pm and is located downtown at West Straat 15 Oranjestad, next to the main bus station. For more information call +297 588 1515. Browse on their website patio15aruba.com or Facebook page **Patio 15 Aruba**. See you there! ☐



Holiday Inn Resort Aruba presents blissful brunch that brightens your day



PALM BEACH — Sundays are to enjoy to the fullest, who does not agree on that. Corals Restaurant at the Holiday Inn Resort Aruba understands this as no other. For a great price you get great value: an extensive, scrumptious, full varied Sunday Brunch Buffet with bottomless mimosas. Take a seat in the cool dining room with full window view at the big blue. This is the definition of a chill Sunday start with big taste!

"It all started with the perception of the ideal Sunday. Sundays are for brunch and mimosas and it appears a trend to take it easy in the morning and indulge into a blissful brunch", says Eva Ruiz, Marketing Director of the resort. "Who does not enjoy to wake up late on a Sunday and take it easy with a coffee, mimosas and everything you crave for?" The Holiday Inn Resort Aruba started this relaxing brunch in February and is positively surprised with the overwhelming enthusiasm. Guests of the resort, outside

guests and locals find their way to their favorite brunch spot. Chef Aldwin Donata could not be happier. "We change the menu every Sunday keeping in the all-time favorites. It is great to see that so many find their way to us, but honestly there is no place where you get this quality brunch for this price", he says with pride.

Boosting Brunch

Jump-start your day and let's do this brunch. Relax, dive in and look around to make your selection at the extensive salad station, soup station, Asian station, carving station, Aruban station, fruit station and bread station. All your breakfast and lunch favorites are here, believe us, and when you think you have fueled yourself with all the delicacies you can imagine there is one more you simply cannot skip: the heavenly dessert station with all home-made pastries, cakes and a chocolate fountain. Sunday Brunch at Corals is a must, treat yourself and your loved ones because you deserve to maximize your day and get the best start.



For more information call +297 586 3600 or email the resort directly at hiaruba@ihg.com.

Every Sunday from 11:00am to 2:00pm the Holiday Inn Resort Aruba is welcoming you, chef Donata and his crew will await you at Corals Restaurant for the \$35 Brunch Buffet (children 6-12 \$17.50) and children under 5 are free. □

Painting workshop at Ateliers '89 with Brazilian artist Dora Longo Bahia

ORANJESTAD — Starting Monday April 12, 2021, Ateliers'89 welcomes acclaimed Brazilian artist and teacher Dora Longo Bahia for a painting workshop. Although painting has been declared dead a number of times, it is very much alive for Dora Longo Bahia. Dora's work and artistry is characterized by a strong commitment and involvement with the world in which she functions as an artist. It is precisely by constantly being aware of this and expressing this in her work that painting remains alive, contemporary and relevant for her.

In this workshop Dora also wants to challenge the participants to think about the impact their paint-

ing has on their daily lives. Can they appeal to their environment through their paintings and influence or even change it? Together with Dora they learn to take the next step in their development by walking new paths, coloring outside the lines and so taking risks in their work. For example, by working on paintings not only individually but also collectively.

It promises to be an extremely inspiring workshop under the guidance of an experienced teacher with a young mind. The working period will be concluded with an exhibition of the works made.

About the artist

Dora Longo Bahia (1961 São Paulo,



Brazil) is a Multimedia artist living and working in São Paulo. From 1984 she worked with scenography, illustration and performance. Since the 1990s, her paintings have mainly talked about the urban condition when dealing with themes such as violence, sex and death. Since 1993 she has been an illustrator for Folha de São Paulo.

Between 1994 and 2018 she was banned as a professor at various leading art academies. But she also played in the punk band Disk-Putas and is still active as a musician in the rock bands Verafisher and Maradonna. Dora Longo Bahia's work has been featured in numerous exhibitions, including the Havana Biennale.

To register call +297 565 4613 or send an email to elvis@ateliers89.com. The workshop will take place at Dominicanessenstraat 34, in Oranjestad, every Monday and Thursday from 6.30pm to 9.30pm, starting April 12th until May 6th, 2021. Seats are limited. □

China attacks foreign clothing, shoe brands over Xinjiang

By **JOE McDONALD**

AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese state TV called Thursday for a boycott of H&M as Beijing lashed out at foreign clothing and footwear brands following Western sanctions on Chinese officials accused of human rights abuses in the Xinjiang region.

The ruling Communist Party criticized H&M for saying in March 2020 it would stop buying cotton from the northwestern Chinese region. The Swedish retailer joined other brands in expressing concern about reports of forced labor there. The party newspaper Global Times also criticized statements by Burberry, Adidas, Nike, New Balance and Zara about Xinjiang as early as two years ago.

"For enterprises that touch the bottom line of our country, the response is very clear: don't buy!" China Central Television said on its social media account. It said the H and M in the Swedish name stood for Chinese words meaning lie and falsehood.

The attacks follow Monday's decision by the 27-nation European Union,



A man wearing a face mask walks by a Swedish fashion brand H&M store outlet in Beijing, Thursday, March 25, 2021.

Associated Press

the United States, Britain and Canada to impose travel and financial sanctions on four Chinese officials blamed for abuses in Xinjiang.

More than 1 million people in Xinjiang, most of them from predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, have been confined to work camps, according to foreign researchers and governments. Beijing denies mistreating them and says it is trying to promote economic development and stamp out radicalism.

"The so-called existence of forced labor in the Xinjiang region is totally fictitious," said a Commerce Minis-

try spokesman, Gao Feng. He called on foreign companies to "correct wrong practices" but did not say what they were expected to do.

Celebrities including Wang Yibo, a popular singer and actor, announced they were breaking endorsement contracts with H&M and Nike.

H&M products were missing from China's most popular e-commerce platforms, Alibaba Group's Tmall and JD.com. News reports said they were removed due to public criticism over its Xinjiang statement. The companies didn't respond to requests for comment.

Beijing often attacks foreign clothing, auto, travel and other brands for actions by their governments or to pressure companies to conform to its official positions on Taiwan, Tibet and other sensitive issues.

Companies usually apologize and change websites or advertising to maintain access to China, one of the biggest global markets. But Xinjiang is an unusually thorny issue. Western brands face pressure at home to distance themselves from possible abuses. A loss of sales in China, the only major economy where consumer spending has rebounded to above pre-pandemic levels, can be especially painful at a time when U.S. and European demand is weak.

H&M Group "doesn't represent any political standpoint" and "respects Chinese consumers," the company said on its social media account.

The company said it deals with 350 Chinese manufacturers to make products that "comply with the principles of sustainable development." H&M said it "is committed to long-term investment and develop-

ment in China." H&M had 520 stores and \$1.4 billion in sales in China in 2019, the last year for which annual figures have been reported. China is its third-largest market after Germany and the United States.

"Spreading lies to boycott Xinjiang while wanting to make money in China? Wishful thinking," the Youth League said.

The Global Times said Burberry, Adidas, Nike and New Balance also made "cutting remarks" about Xinjiang cotton. A separate Global Times report cited what it said was a statement by Zara that it had a "zero-tolerance approach towards forced labor."

H&M's statement last year cited a decision by the Better Cotton Initiative, an industry group that promotes environmental and labor standards, to stop licensing Xinjiang cotton because it was "increasingly difficult" to trace how it was produced.

In September, H&M announced it would stop working with a Chinese manufacturer that was accused of using forced labor in a unit unrelated to the Swedish brand. □

As freeze in air travel begins to thaw, United adds flights

By **MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP**
Business Writer

With confidence rising that the end of the pandemic is growing closer, airlines are starting to revive flights that vanished last year as people cancelled vacations and business trips. United Airlines will add 26 new nonstop routes from

Midwest cities to vacation spots like Hilton Head, S.C.; Pensacola, Fla.; and Portland, Maine. The airline said Thursday that it is also restarting more than 20 domestic routes and will initiate new service between Orange County, Calif., and Honolulu. Scheduled United flights

to Latin America will exceed levels before the pandemic, compared with the same period in 2019, including more flights to Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America and South America. The carrier will resume flights between Chicago and Tokyo and between New York/New-

ark and Milan and Rome, and restart service between Chicago and Amsterdam.

While that means United will be operating only 52% of its overall schedule compared with May 2019, it's significantly better than in May 2020, when flights were being operated at levels of about 14% of the same period the year before.

Shares of United Airlines Holdings Inc., based in Chicago, hit a 52-week high last week along with every other major carrier and its shares rose 3% Thursday. Shares in the entire sector were pulled higher behind United. Air traffic has been increasing, particularly with the start of the spring break season.

Tuesday marked the 13th straight day that more than 1 million passengers went through U.S. airport checkpoints, according to the Transportation Security Administration. But traffic is still down about half from the same period in 2019.

Airlines have begun to loosen some restrictions, including opening up middle seats that had been blocked during the pandemic. The last holdout is Delta Air Lines, which has extended empty middle seats through April 30.

Airlines are also bringing back snacks and drinks after halting service last year to limit contact between flight attendants and passengers. Some, but not all, have resumed selling alcohol. □



In this March 25, 2020 file photo, United Airlines planes are parked at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston.

Associated Press

No turning back: Facebook reckons with a post-2020 world

By **BARBARA ORTUTAY**
AP Technology Writer

It's becoming increasingly clear that for Facebook, there is no returning to its habits of the past. Some of its most dramatic post-election changes, from algorithm tweaks to a strict crackdown on political misinformation, were supposed to be temporary "break-glass" measures intended to prevent civil unrest as then-President Donald Trump spread false claims of a "rigged" election. But the Jan. 6 insurrection, the rise in COVID vaccine misinformation and the persistent spread of malicious conspiracies coupled with a new U.S. president and growing regulatory scrutiny around the world have forced a reckoning at the social network. "They don't want to be the arbiters of free speech," said Cliff Lampe, a professor studying social media platforms, moderation and misinformation at the University of Michigan. "But they have to be."

For CEO Mark Zuckerberg, the past year has presented a series of humbling events that have picked away at his long-held assertion that Facebook is a worldwide force for good. In Facebook posts, public comments and discussions with employees, the CEO appears to be increasingly grappling with the dark



In this March 29, 2018, file photo the logo for Facebook appears on screens at the Nasdaq MarketSite in New York's Times Square.

side of the empire he created. Take his approach to Trump, who until January enjoyed special treatment on Facebook and other social media platforms, despite spreading misinformation, promulgating hate and what finally got him banned inciting violence. "Over the last several years, we have allowed President Trump to use our platform consistent with our own rules, at times removing content or labeling his posts when they violate our policies," Zuckerberg wrote on his Facebook page on Jan. 7, explaining the company's decision to suspend Trump. "We did this because we believe that the

public has a right to the broadest possible access to political speech, even controversial speech." A day earlier, violent insurrectionists, egged on by Trump, descended on the U.S. Capitol in a deadly riot. While Facebook's (and other tech companies') move to ban a sitting president was unprecedented, many called it too little, too late. It's not yet clear if Facebook will banish the former president permanently, as Twitter has. The company battled that decision over to its quasi-independent Oversight Board sort of a Supreme Court of Facebook enforcement which is expected to rule on the matter in April. On Thursday, Zuckerberg, along with the CEOs of Twitter and Google, will testify before Congress about extremism and misinformation on their platforms. Companies like Facebook are "creeping along towards firmer action," said Jennifer Grygiel, a Syracuse University communications professor and an expert on social media, while noting a Trump ban alone doesn't undo years of inaction. Lampe said he doesn't doubt that Facebook would like to return to its pre-2020, hands-off approach, but public pressure to crack down on extremism will likely win over. That's because online extremism,

fueled by social media in the U.S. and around the world is more and more tied to real-world violence. The company is also facing a growing internal push from increasingly vocal employees, some of whom have quit publicly, staged walkouts and protests in the past year. Last summer, meanwhile, advertisers staged a boycott of Facebook's business. And activists are finding growing support from lawmakers on the state, federal and global level. Jessica Gonzalez, attorney at the racial justice group Free Press, recently joined Democratic Rep. Tony Cardenas and Latino activists in calling on Facebook to crack down on hate and misinformation targeted at Latinos in the United States. She said when she and other civil rights activists met with Zuckerberg last summer during an advertising boycott of the company, she reminded him of the 2019 massacre in El Paso, when a gunman targeting Mexicans killed 23 people. "Facebook has a choice," she said. It can be a "vector for hate and lies that harm people of color, Latinos, immigrants and other groups," or on the right side of history. "So far it has done a lot of talking," Gonzalez said. Facebook says it's met with the organizations and shares their goal of stop-

ping Spanish-language misinformation on its apps. "We are taking aggressive steps to fight misinformation in Spanish and dozens of other languages, including by removing millions of pieces of COVID-19 and vaccine content," the company said in a statement. Though its moves have often been halting, the social media giant has worked to address some of the criticisms lobbed at it in recent years. Besides election misinformation, it has put restrictions on anti-vaccine propaganda, banned extremist groups such as QAnon, limited recommending other problematic groups to users and tries to promote authoritative information from health agencies and trusted news organizations. "There's no single solution to fighting misinformation which is why we attack it from many angles," Facebook said in a statement, pointing to its removal of fake accounts and coordinated networks, fact-checking partnerships and providing authoritative information. "We know these efforts don't catch everything, which is why we're always working in partnership with policymakers, academics, and other experts to adapt to the latest trends in misinformation." Facebook's reluctant shift toward more self-regulation didn't begin with the 2020 election. An earlier turning point for the company and for Zuckerberg himself, Lampe recalled, was the company's role in inciting genocidal violence against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. In 2018, Facebook commissioned a report on the role its platform played in stoking ethnic cleansing. It found that Facebook "has become a means for those seeking to spread hate and cause harm, and posts have been linked to offline violence." "It was a humbling experience for company and for (Zuckerberg) personally," Lampe said. □

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

9		8						
				5		6		
2			6		1		8	
		6				8		
	5			2			3	
		3				5		
	8		1		7			6
		2		9				
						9		7

Difficulty Level ★★★★★

3/26

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Report:

Extremist groups thrive on Facebook despite bans



In this Tuesday, Jan. 17, 2017, file photo, the Facebook logo is displayed at a gathering for startup companies at Paris' Station F.

Associated Press

By BARBARA ORTUTAY
AP Technology Writer

A new outside report found that Facebook has allowed groups many tied to QAnon, boogaloo and militia movements — to glorify violence during the 2020 election and in the weeks leading up to the deadly riots on the U.S. Capitol in January. Avaaz, a nonprofit advocacy group that says it seeks to protect democracies from misinformation, identified 267 pages and groups on Facebook that it says spread violence-glorifying material in the heat of the 2020 election to a combined following of 32 million users.

More than two-thirds of the groups and pages had names that aligned with several domestic extremist movements, the report found. The first, boogaloo, promotes a second U.S. civil war and the breakdown of modern society. The second is the QAnon conspiracy, which claims that Donald Trump is waging a

secret battle against the "deep state" and a sect of powerful Satan-worshipping pedophiles who dominate Hollywood, big business, the media and government. The rest are various anti-government militias. All have been largely banned from Facebook since 2020. But despite what Avaaz called "clear violations" of Facebook's policies, it found that 119 of these pages and groups were still active on the platform as of Feb. 24 and had just under 27 million followers. Facebook said late Monday that of the 119 that Avaaz found, only 18 "actually violated" Facebook's policies. Four had already been removed before Monday and Facebook has now taken down the remaining 14.

Facebook acknowledged that its policy enforcement "isn't perfect," but said the report distorts its work against violent extremism and misinformation.

The company said in a statement that it has done more than any other internet company to stanch the flow of harmful material, citing its bans of "nearly 900 militarized social movements" and the removal of tens of thousands of QAnon pages, groups, and accounts. It added that it is always improving its efforts against misinformation.

On Thursday, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey and Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai are slated to testify before Congress about extremism and misinformation on their platforms.

Facebook has tightened its rules against violence, hate and misinformation in the past year. In October, it banned QAnon groups across its platform. Before that, it would remove them only if they expressly supported violence. It has also banned extremist and militia movements and boogaloo groups with varying degrees of success.

For instance, while Facebook banned "Stop the Steal" groups from its platform, Avaaz like The Associated Press found that such groups and the #stopthes-

teal hashtag remained active on the platform after the purge.

Facebook's failures, Avaaz said, "helped sweep America down the path from election to insurrection."

According to the report, the social network provided a "fertile ground" for misinformation and toxicity that contributed to radicalizing millions of Americans, helping create the conditions in which the storming of the Capitol became a reality. □



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Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

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Prof. Taxi	588 0035
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'Godzilla vs. Kong'; A heavyweight bout with a light touch

By RYAN PEARSON

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The original 1950s Godzilla movies stomped into theaters carrying a metaphor about nuclear destruction. Two years ago, "Godzilla: King of the Monsters" sounded alarms about climate change. But don't fret about finding a message amid the mayhem as the towering radioactive lizard clashes with that instantly-recognizable giant ape in "Godzilla vs. Kong," debuting Wednesday.

"It's about two big guys bashing each other around," laughed actor Rebecca Hall, who plays a researcher studying King Kong. "There is a sense that the less that humans meddle with stuff, the better, is a general theme."

"But yeah, it's mostly a big fight," she said.

Director Adam Wingard's clash of the titans caps Legendary Entertainment's "Monsterverse" series, which includes 2014's "Godzilla" and 2017's "Kong: Skull Island." While not all were winners with critics, they've grabbed plenty of cash at the box office — more than \$1.4 billion worldwide.

All four films take their central creatures seriously — both within the stories and by pouring money into nu-



This image released by Warner Bros. Entertainment shows a scene from "Godzilla vs. Kong." Associated Press

anced special effects — while often winking at audiences with self-aware references. The films have featured performances from top-caliber actors enjoying the silliness of it all: Bryan Cranston, Ken Watanabe, Tom Hiddleston, John C. Reilly, Sally Hawkins, Vera Farmiga.

In the newest entry, the returning Millie Bobby Brown and Kyle Chandler are joined by Hall, Alexander Skarsgård, Brian Tyree Henry and Eiza González, among others. No matter the scene, the actors always knew who was filling the top spots on call sheets during production — Godzilla and King Kong.

"They're divas, that's what's so difficult. You go on to set, they don't look at you in the eye. It is in

their contracts. Whatever. I found it really difficult to work with specifically Kong, just because he thought he ruled the roost," cracked Brown. "You just want your close-up. And Zilla is like 'rawr' and you're like, 'Bro, calm down.'"

Wingard said he focused on keeping the humans "as close together as possible" with the monsters throughout his film, including an "E.T."-evoking moment with deaf actor Kaylee Hottle. But when the titular showdowns start, "it was really important to me to do what the original films did. Like if you look at all the Showa-era films, when the monster battles happened, it just stays with the monsters. ... We wanted to make sure the monsters were able to do their thing and just get

into it." That includes a fight on and underneath an aircraft carrier in the middle of the ocean, with Kong struggling and Godzilla moving smoothly and realistically through water. Later, shattering neon highlights an eye-popping clash among and through the skyscrapers of a heavily-stylized Hong Kong.

Skarsgård, whose character leads a human team following Kong to the film's most fantastical location, said Wingard's approach was to "really lean into the craziness of it. And his take on it was, well, if you're going to go big, go really big. Go crazy, let's have fun with it, we haven't seen these titans go toe-to-toe in 50 years, 60 years. So let's really enjoy this."

Godzilla's atomic breath

and Kong's chest-thumping were crafted for maximum sensory impact, but viewers can also see it on the small screen. A pandemic-disrupted rollout has the film debuting Wednesday both at theaters and on streaming service HBO Max. The film's stars say they're just happy to share the spectacle, whether it's on an IMAX or iPhone screen.

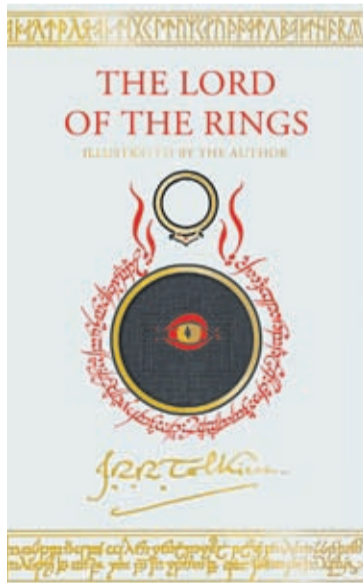
"These are extraordinary times that demand extraordinary measures," said Demián Bichir, who plays an overreaching tech mogul. "This is one of those films that will be seen in every corner of the planet. And that alone makes me very, very happy."

Henry, the "Atlanta" series star who plays a conspiracy-theorizing podcast host, said the film's extravagance feels right for this moment in the pandemic. "People need something to just like celebrate and cheer and have fun and see millions of dollars of special effects," he said. "It's like we shifted what we do in summer blockbusters to the spring because it's like we just need something to break out, something to have fun with."

Legendary and distributor Warner Bros haven't announced any future "Monsterverse" installments after "Godzilla vs. Kong." Wingard said he'd be happy to return to a "phase two" of the franchise, envisioning a "nearly silent film where we just watch the monsters do their thing."

"There are enough characters that are well-enough defined where we can imprint whatever we want on them," he said. "I think audiences are ready. And I think the special effects world is up-to-date to be able to handle that."

New 'Lord of the Rings' edition to include Tolkien artwork



This combination photo shows an upcoming edition of J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, left, and a 1967 photo of Tolkien.

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — An upcoming edition of J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy will include paintings, drawings and other illustrations by the British author for the first time since it was published in the mid-1950s.

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books & Media announced Thursday that the new version will come out Oct. 19. Deb Brody, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's vice president and publisher, noted that Tolkien was already known for his illustrations which appeared in "The Hobbit" and that his artwork for "The Lord of the Rings" had been exhibited in 2018 in New York, Paris and in Oxford, England.

"Yet the author himself was characteristically modest, dismissive of the obvious and rare artistic talent he possessed despite having had no formal training," Brody said in a statement. "This modesty meant that relatively little else of his artwork was known of or seen during his lifetime, and generally only in scholarly books afterwards."

"The Lord of the Rings" books, which include "The Fellowship of the Ring," "The Two Towers" and "The Return of the King," are among the best-selling fantasy novels in history. They were adapted into a blockbuster trilogy of films by director Peter Jackson.

9	6	8	3	4	2	1	7	5
4	1	7	8	5	9	6	2	3
2	3	5	6	7	1	4	8	9
7	2	6	5	1	3	8	9	4
8	5	4	9	2	6	7	3	1
1	9	3	7	8	4	5	6	2
5	8	9	1	3	7	2	4	6
6	7	2	4	9	5	3	1	8
3	4	1	2	6	8	9	5	7

Difficulty Level ★★★★★

3/26

Crosby, Penguins push Buffalo's winless streak to 15 games

By The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Sidney Crosby scored his 13th goal of the season, Tristan Jarry stopped 26 shots and the Pittsburgh Penguins pushed Buffalo's winless streak to 15 games with a 5-2 victory Wednesday night.

Evan Rodrigues, Kris Letang, John Marino and Zach Aston-Reese scored also for the Penguins. The teams will complete the two-game set Thursday night.

Buffalo goalie Dustin Tokarski, making his first NHL start in more than five years with Carter Hutton out due to a lower-body injury, made 7 saves and kept the Sabres in it until late in the second period, when Marino and Aston-Reese scored just over 2 minutes apart.

Buffalo's Rasmus Dahlin scored his second goal of the season and Victor Olofsson beat Jarry on a penalty shot in the third period.

Buffalo's 15-game winless streak (0-13-2) is a record for futility since the shoot-out was introduced during the 2005-06 season, and the league's longest stretch without a victory since Arizona went 15 games between wins from Feb. 21-March 21, 2004. The Sabres have been outscored 63-30 during the slide.

WILD 3, DUCKS 2



Pittsburgh Penguins' Sidney Crosby (87) skates past the net after scoring on Buffalo Sabres goalie Dustin Tokarski during the third period of an NHL hockey game, Wednesday, March 24, 2021, in Pittsburgh. The Penguins won 5-2.

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Jared Spurgeon had two goals, Nico Sturm broke a tie and Minnesota beat Anaheim to sweep the two-game set.

Cam Talbot made 28 saves to help the Wild extended or franchise record with their 10th straight home win. Ryan Suter had two assists for Minnesota, becoming the fifth active NHL defenseman to reach 600 career points.

Derek Grant and Max Comtois scored for Ana-

heim. The Ducks have lost seven of eight. Ryan Miller made 23 saves in his sixth straight start with John Gibson out for his fifth game with a lower-body injury.

SENATORS 3, FLAMES 1

OTTAWA, Ontario (AP) — Rookie Filip Gustavsson made 28 saves, Chris Tierney broke a third-period tie and Ottawa beat Calgary.

Gustavsson beat the Flames 2-1 on Monday night in his first NHL start. Last in the all-Canadian North Division at 12-20-3, the Senators have

earned a least a point in five straight games (3-0-2), and are 5-2 against Calgary this season.

Rookie Josh Norris tied it with at 4:48 of the third with his third goal in four games, Tierney gave Ottawa the lead with 7:59 left, and Nikita Zaitsev added an empty-netter.

Mark Giordano scored for Calgary, and Jacob Markstrom made 28 saves.

SHARKS 4, KINGS 2

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — Martin Jones made 42

saves for San Jose to stymie Los Angeles for a second straight game.

Jones followed up a 41-save performance in a 2-1 win Monday with another sharp effort to become the first Sharks goalie with at least 40 saves in consecutive games since Arturs Irbe in 1993, according to SportRadar.

After getting pulled five times in his first 15 starts this year, Jones has allowed just five goals on 147 shots in his past four.

Evander Kane scored twice, and Rudolfs Balcers and Tomas Hertl also scored to give the Sharks a sweep of the two-game series.

Alex Lafallo and Adrian Kempe scored for the Kings, and Cal Petersen made 24 saves. Los Angeles has lost five of seven.

JETS 5, CANUCKS 1

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Andrew Copp scored four goals to carry Winnipeg past Vancouver. Copp had a pair of power-play goals in the second period and two more goals in the third to give the Jets (20-11-2) their second straight win over the Canucks.

Mark Scheifele also scored for Winnipeg, and Connor Hellebuyck stopped 38 shots. □

Trade deadline passes, and Kyle Lowry remains with Raptors

By TIM REYNOLDS

AP Basketball Writer

Kyle Lowry stayed with the Toronto Raptors, and the Miami Heat got Victor Oladipo instead. And on a trade deadline day where moves were getting made right up until the last possible moment, the Denver Nuggets took a big swing at getting better for a playoff run while the Orlando Magic began a rebuild. Lowry — perhaps the biggest prize on the market — did not get traded, the Raptors apparently unable to find enough assets to their liking. Miami was one of the biggest pursuers for Lowry, who they may still target as a free agent later this year,

wound up adding Oladipo from the Houston Rockets. It didn't cost Miami much: Kelly Olynyk was on an expiring deal, and Avery Bradley has barely played for the Heat this season because of COVID-19 and then a calf injury. The deal also included pick swap in 2022, a person with knowledge of the matter told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the deal needed league approval. Oladipo has wanted to be in Miami for some time, and the Rockets made that happen. Orlando swung three separate deals to move three of their four leading scorers this season, including All-Star Nikola Vucevic.

He's going to Chicago, while Evan Fournier got moved to the Boston Celtics and Aaron Gordon was sent to the Nuggets. Questions swirled around Lowry all the way to the 3 p.m. EST deadline, and there were signs that the Raptors were positioning themselves to make the move. Toronto traded Matt Thomas to Utah and Terrence Davis to Sacramento for a future draft picks not long before the deadline opened up roster spots, which were necessary because anyone who obtained Lowry would have had to send multiple players to Toronto in order to make the salary ramifications work.

So, on his 35th birthday,

Lowry woke up as a Raptor — and remained one. "Everything will be fine," Lowry said on Wednesday, when asked about the looming deadline and incessant reports about his trade prospects. "Everything will be fine, no matter what happens." Toronto entered the day expected to move either Lowry, Norman Powell or both; in the end, it was just Powell, who went to the Portland Trail Blazers for Gary Trent Jr. and Rodney Hood. Those teams meet Sunday in Tampa, Florida, the Raptors' home this season because the U.S.-Canadian border is closed because of the pandemic. □



Toronto Raptors guard Kyle Lowry (7) celebrates a three-point basket during the second half of an NBA basketball game against the Denver Nuggets Wednesday, March 24, 2021, in Tampa, Fla.

Associated Press

NCAA tourney proof of narrowing talent gap in college hoops



Oral Roberts forward Kevin Obanor (0) drives to the basket ahead of Florida forward Anthony Duruji, left, during the second half of a college basketball game in the second round of the NCAA tournament at Indiana Farmers Coliseum, Sunday, March 21, 2021 in Indianapolis.

Associated Press

By **DAVE SKRETTA**
AP Basketball Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — One by one, the college basketball coaches had filed into the sweltering gym on the campus of Whitney Young Magnet High School, dressed in their polos and windbreakers and sporting their school logos, all craning their necks to get a glimpse of one of the best prep prospects to come out of Chicago in years. It was impossible to miss the 6-foot-11 frame of Jahlil Okafor, casually throwing down those dunks in the warmup line. It was much easier to miss freshman teammate Lucas Williamson. A few years later, Okafor has gone from can't-miss prospect to one-and-done star at Duke to the riches of the NBA, while Williamson has become one of the darlings of the NCAA Tournament. The slender guard with the big game has become the do-everything star for Loyola Chicago, which is once again making an inspired run through March. The fact that Williamson

ended up at Loyola Chicago, and Loyola Chicago in the Sweet 16, is evidence of what some coaches have predicted for years: A once-yawning talent gap between haves and have-nots has narrowed to nothing. The difference in a top-50 kid headed to Duke or Kentucky and an unranked kid heading to Loyola might have felt like night and day 15 years ago. Now, the difference is negligible — if it exists at all. "There's just more good players," Loyola Chicago coach Porter Moser explained. "Thirty years ago when I got into this in Texas, to now, you look at it — there's so many five-star players. But it's across the board. Kids are getting better. They're doing more improvement. Skill development. They're getting bigger and stronger. There's more of it." That sheer volume of talent on high school and AAU teams is why a kid like Williamson, who had every big-name school in his gym to watch Okafor during his freshman year, could

still get overlooked by just about everybody. By the time he was a senior, Williamson had few scholarship offers and ultimately chose to join a team now led by All-American forward Cameron Krutwig, a three-star prospect out of high school in suburban Chicago whose only other offers were from Northern Illinois and American. Backcourt mate Braden Norris began his career at Oakland before he arrived on Chicago's north side. Marquise Kennedy is perhaps the most coveted prospect Loyola has landed in years, but even he picked the Ramblers over offers from the likes of Bradley, Hofstra and Northeastern. The bluebloods of college basketball weren't beating down the doors for any of them. Not that it bothers them these days. Kentucky and Duke didn't even make the NCAA Tournament. Kansas and Illinois were sent packing the opening weekend. And the Ramblers, the guys who ousted the top-seeded Illini, moved on to face

Oregon State on Saturday. "The end of the day," Williamson said, "the respect that teams give us before we play, that doesn't really concern us. We're only focused on winning games and continuing this big run that we've been having." Oregon State can relate. The Beavers' signing classes have ranked outside the top 50 nationally each of the past two years, according to recruiting site Rivals.com. Yet they ran roughshod through the Pac-12 tourney to earn an NCAA invite, then beat Tennessee and Oklahoma State to reach their first Sweet 16 since 1982. One of their leaders, sophomore guard Jarod Lucas, chose to play for the Beavers over Nevada and Fresno State. "I think at the end of the day it's all about, there's a bigger plan for all of us," he said. "Not a lot of us had the best looks or the high-majors, other bluebloods, but we all had one coach, one university that believed in you. All of us at Oregon State have one coach that believed in us. And we

all appreciate the belief coach (Wayne) Tinkle has in us." Recruiting rankings are heavily subjective, of course. Prospects grow and develop in college, some more than others, and it's nearly impossible to identify intrinsic qualities such as pride and work ethic that portend a future star. Yet rankings do illustrate how evenly spread talent is across college basketball these days. Five of the top 12 schools in Rivals.com's final recruiting rankings for 2020 failed to make this year's tourney, and the top four from the previous year failed to make it, too. That includes Kentucky, which had the No. 1 class last spring but went 9-16 this season, and Memphis, which was No. 1 in 2019 but had its bubble burst on Selection Sunday. Meanwhile, nine of the 16 teams remaining had recruiting classes last season that landed outside of the top 25. Loyola, Creighton, Syracuse and UCLA haven't had a top-40 class the past three seasons. Oral Roberts, the second No. 15 seed to ever reach this point in the tournament, hasn't had a class that ranked in the top 100. Obanor played at North Carolina prep school power Mount Zion Christian Academy, which produced the likes of NBA stars Tracy McGrady and Amar'e Stoudemire. Its campus is less than 5 miles from Cameron Indoor Stadium, yet Duke never came calling. Twenty miles the other direction is North Carolina State, which only showed mild interest. Think the Blue Devils and Wolfpack would like to be playing basketball this weekend? "We put our shoes on just like they put their shoes on," said Obanor, who had 30 points against the Buckeyes and 28 against the Gators. "We don't look at, 'OK, they are ranked No. 2 or they have higher standards so they are better than us.' We come out with the mentality that, 'You feel like you're better than us? Just prove it.'"